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The Practice

of the presence
of God by

Burton Lawrence

The Spiritual
Guide by
Problems

of indication

of Christ
by St. Thomas

Practical Mystics
7 or Everyday Mystics

By
Evelyn Underhill

Beloved Adhyapya:

I want to talk to you tonight about Meditation, for I believe that there are many important points that have not been brought out and that would be of the greatest help to you at this period in your work, when you are rapidly bridging the Gulf in the Unseen.

Meditation may be defined as the practice of concentrated and directed thinking, designed to build up an Attitude of the Mind. It is an exceedingly important part of the Discipline that awakens the Mind to Higher Consciousness. Without the regular practice of Meditation according to Sound Technique, any real achievement is almost impossible. There are, of course, innumerable books upon the subject from many different points of view, and each of these viewpoints has its value, and usually we are inclined to one or the other, according to the bias of our characters and the needs of our lives.

Meditation may be considered from four different standpoints: firstly, that of the development of the Personality as such, with a view to a happier and more successful Life and the enhancement of the capacity; and secondly, what may be termed generically the New Thought Standpoint, wherein the aim is, broadly speaking, to bring the Soul into harmony with God; thirdly, from the Occult or Yogi Standpoint; and fourthly, from the Mystical Standpoint, whether Christian or Non-Christian, wherein the aim is to have the Soul make the unreserved dedication and unite itself with the Godhead.

It is my belief that the concentration upon any of these to the exclusion of all others, even tho this is strenuously recommended by the exponents of the different systems, does not give the best results in human Life values. It is quite true that the greatest efficiency in the system chosen is gained by such concentration, but the sense of proportion is lost and the development is onesided. Consciousness has more than one level and the development of all the levels in a harmonious proportion is needed for the perfection of Humanity. None of these systems, left to itself, does this, and, therefore, none of these systems contains a complete curriculum for the perfection of Humanity. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own Soul?" And would he be much better off if he opened up the Higher Aspects of Mystical Consciousness and lost his physical health, or if he achieved the greater Power of Yoga and sacrificed his mental balance?

Therefore, I want to counsel everyone who takes up the intensive practice of Meditation to devise for himself a Discipline which shall include all four Aspects, so that the tremendous Powers awakened by Yoga Methods may be disciplined and dedicated by the Mystical Contact, and the harmonizing and soothing influence of the New Thought, reiterated auto-suggestion, may inspire and stabilize the Mind, and the common sense dicta of plain character building and faculty development may help to maintain a sense of just proportion.

Now, remember that Meditation is by no means a thing easy of achievement, it is the callisthenics of the Soul, and leads on to its acrobatics and athletics. When we first embark upon its practices we shall find that when the first enthusiasm wanes the Mind itself will resist the practices as if with a deliberately willed antagonism. This corresponds to the stiffness of the muscles of an Athlete who is out of condition. We all know, however, that the best way to get rid of that painful stiffness is to move the muscles until they warm up and become limber. Such stiffness is best worked off; to try to rest it off is worse than useless. So it is with the Mind, we must summon up all our resources of Will and Perseverance to get thru the initial resistance of the Mind. Once this has been successfully accomplished, and the habit of Medita-

tion accomplished, the very resistance and inertia of the Mind that made the practice of the Discipline so difficult will help to maintain it when once the habit has been acquired. We shall be as uneasy and discomforted if we miss our Meditation time as if we missed a meal.

It is a very great help in the early stages if an external Discipline helps us to carry out the resolutions we have made. It is for this reason that we require the Brotherhood Students at this stage of their work to keep a Meditation Diary and submit it once a month. The very knowledge that the Diary will have to be sent in with blank pages helps to resolutely enforce the Discipline upon your Mind.

A regular Meditation period with which nothing has been allowed to interfere is absolutely essential. The best time is immediately after dressing and before breakfast. The absence of food in the stomach makes Meditation much easier, and the activity of dressing insures that we are sufficiently wide awake not to drift off into dream-land instead of following a train of thought with concentration. To many people this early morning, before the demands of the day take too great a hold upon them, is the only time they can call their own with surety. The Mind, fresh from sleep and undisturbed, is best for the contemplation of Inner Things. There is no better investment we can make toward Spiritual and Mental Progress than this half hour sacrificed from sleep.

It is not a good plan to practice Meditation lying in bed before arising for only a superhuman will can keep you awake under such circumstances, and you are in all probability apt to deceive yourself as to the extent to which you are awake, though it is a good plan to turn the thoughts to an invocation of the Masters immediately upon awakening, while Consciousness is still on the frontiers of sleep. Such a practice speedily becomes habitual, and you will find that you regularly awaken to find yourself subconsciously invoking the Masters. Such a thought, which often escapes from the limitation of waking consciousness, is very potent. It is always an excellent plan to go to sleep and contemplate, directing the Mind toward some Idea or Ideal, and allowing the thoughts to circle gently around it until the Mind drifts out on the tide of sleep. Concentration should not be attempted, intruding thoughts should be merely inhibited, and the Mind encouraged to brood quietly and almost at random on the chosen Idea. After a few nights it will be found that almost before the thoughts are called home and are directed on the chosen Idea, you will have sunk into the most peaceful and refreshing sleep imaginable, and even if sleep does not immediately supervene and you lay awake for a time, as often occurs with highly strung people, you are, nevertheless, resting, for the Mind is at Peace and at low tension, and is not threshing itself to pieces with the bugaboos of anxiety and an over-vivid imagination.

Now, there is no better way of going to sleep than in tranquil contemplation of a Spiritual Ideal, nor is there any surer way of bringing it to birth in your nature. This should be your routine procedure night after night, for it is helpful and healthful. It should not be your constant practice to attempt Occult feats in sleep, such as Telepathy, going up thru the Halls of Initiation, or projecting the Astral Body; if you do these things too frequently the disturbance of the function of sleep is apt to ensue. These are matters for the trained Initiate who is properly equipped with the necessary words of Power, etc., and others should attempt them only occasionally, until their technique is perfect.

Another useful practice is that of Mid-day Salutation, in which the thoughts are raised to the Masters at High Noon. The Symbol implied being the Sun in Midheavens. This practice soon attunes you to the Spiritual Forces of the Guides, and has some very important effects

upon Consciousness, it is vitalizing and joy bringing, and harmonizes the whole Being, correlating its different aspects - mental, emotional, instinctive, and Spiritual, and they meet in perfect accord.

It is very advantageous, if it can be managed, always to Meditate in the same place, but even if you cannot manage it always, you can have some Symbol which you take out from its covers and set up as the focus of your Meditation. You should always have such a Meditative Symbol. It is the greatest possible help. The student who tries to acquire the habit of Meditation without recourse to such extraneous aid is giving himself much unnecessary trouble and until use is made of such a Symbol, the effect will not be believed. Moreover, the more it is used, the more potent it grows, and Thought-Forms are building up around it with every Meditation that is performed.

Remember, too, for a Symbol to develop in full potency, it is essential that it should always be kept reverently covered up when not in use, and that you should be extremely discreet as to whom you allow to even look upon it, and no one save the owner should ever lay a finger on it, and even he should take it in his hands with reverence. By these precautions the magnetism which the Symbol acquires is prevented from dispersing, and so develops with every Meditation performed. Not only is the chosen Symbol connected by the Law of Mental Association with the Ideal of Meditation, but an actual Atmosphere is built up around it, and this Atmosphere is even more than a Thought-Form, it is an actual Magnetic Aura, and its influence is according to its nature. Its inestimable value lies in its Power to recall the wandering thoughts and attune them to the key note with which it is indued. The Meditations you have performed in its presence, during periods of Spiritual Insight act as mentors during periods of Spiritual dryness. It is a storage battery of Spiritual Forces, and like a similar battery on a car, provides the spark that enables the engine to make a start.

The simplest form of Symbol for use under unfavorable conditions, such as when travelling or when privacy is lacking, is a suitable picture or postal card of some work of art expressing the aspiration of the Soul; or the card may be a plain one of similar size on which such Symbols as are known to the student may be drawn, or a reproduction of one of the paintings of the Nazarene. A little travelling photograph frame of leather or paper or cloth with a piece of glass as a protection to the picture, and folding flat like a pocketbook, makes an excellent little Shrine-case. It is a good plan to make an envelope of black silk into which it can be fitted as this helps to preserve the Shrine from psychic contamination and physical wear and tear.

When conditions are more favorable a more elaborate Shrine can be constructed in your Sanctum, and the most suitable thing for the purpose is a small medicine cabinet which can be fastened to the wall at a convenient height for contemplation, the door of this can be shut when not in use, and when opened reveals the interior with its Symbolic decorations and objects hallowed by association with the prayer and Aspirations of the Soul. Incense always is very helpful to the making of an atmosphere which aids concentration. It can be had in the long joss-sticks from any shop that goes in for Oriental goods, or in the small cones which are on sale everywhere. A little experimenting will prove which kinds are useful and suitable, and which are not. There is a very elaborate science of aromatics in connection with States of Consciousness, but I do not want to go into that yet. For all practical purposes any sweet substance, even if it be only smoldering pine cones, which serves to change the physical atmosphere of the room from that to which you are habituated will be of assistance in enabling the Mind to shift its levels from the Outer to the Inner World.

The ideal Incense to use is, of course, that which is closely blended and especially compounded of the fragrant gums. There is, tho, a drawback for its use for daily Meditation in the difficulty of its manipulation, for it has to be burned upon smoldering charcoal, and the whole affair takes some time to get started, and even then, unless it is burnt in a swinging censor, it goes out very easily.

There is one thing, however, that can be maintained before the simplest Shrine, for where the Incense has a tendency to advertize itself all over the house and renders its employment inadvisable, and that is the little vase of flowers. There should be something in every shrine that demands daily attention, whether it be the little guarded flame or the little floral offering, there should be some small sacrifice offered daily to keep the Spirit of the Shrine alive.

A Meditation Robe is also a great help. It is best formed of thin black silk, or, failing that, of some thin cotton stuff, such as mercerized lawn, and should be voluminous to swathe the entire figure in ample draperies, including long loose sleeves to fall over the hands, and a monk's cowl to pull over the head. When not in use it should go into a black silk case and be put away apart from outside clothes. The whole idea underlying the material precautions taken to protect sacred things from profanation, or demagnetization, which is the same thing, is based upon the analogy of electricity. The subtle force which is woven into intangible forms by the Power of the Mind, and which is the link between Mind and Matter, is electro-magnetic in nature. If you work by electric analogy when dealing with its subtle manifestations you shall not go far wrong. The most effective material for insulation is black silk, hence its use in protecting these things.

All this paraphernalia may seem somewhat strange to one accustomed to the simplicities of Protestant prayer, but, if experimented with, its efficiency will be soon realized. We are not under any delusion that it has any effect upon the disposition of God to incline Him favorably toward the user, nor upon Spiritual Forces to cause them to flow in fanciful channels, but it does have a very marked effect upon the Consciousness of those who employ it, and it is for this reason that I recommend its use to those commencing upon this period of the practice of Meditation. The experienced Meditator may be independent of all such devices, but the beginner in what is actually an art of no small difficulty will find them of the very greatest assistance.

With regard to getting these articles for the shrine: Visit one of the better Ten Cent Stores where you'll find vases for flowers, little slender ones to hold just a blossom or two, or a twig of leaves, little bronze-like cups for burning incense; and in your books stores you can pick up a plain cross of gold or wood, a Bible, and a good photo copy of some inspiring scene or subject that will form a focus in your Meditation, or even a copy of one of the paintings of the Master; in the Ten Cent Stores, too, are fine little easel frames for your picture for the temporary shrine, and the case you can easily make or have made. A little thought and study will make a permanent or temporary Shrine that will be very beautiful and inspiring at little cost.

Books written about the Inner Life are many, but "The Practice of the Presence of God" by Brother Lawrence, Carmelite lay brother, reveals the nature of mystical Life. The "Spiritual Guide" by Molinos, the book for which he was sentenced to perpetual confinement for heretical utterances, is another; and finally St. Thomas A Kempis' "Initiation of Christ." Books concerning the raising of Consciousness are also many, Evelyn Underhill's "Practical Mysticism for Everyday People" is good.

In the Bonds of the Eternal Brotherhood,

Sri Dayananda, S.C.